

# FRIENDS OF SHIRTCLIFFE

Newsletter No.70  
Christmas 2023

## Dear Friends

Well, here we are at the end of 2023, and what a year it has been!

We've had floods, we've had droughts, we've had snow. And Summer morphed into Winter without allowing Autumn his turn in the limelight.

The path along the Valley bottom, from Schubert Bridge to Calcium Corner, has suffered badly from the 'climatic conditions. It was bad enough having to contend with motorbikes ripping up the surface – are we now going to have to deal with motorboats!

Seriously though, there are significant problems which will need to be addressed – though not by Friends of Shirtcliffe.

Vicar Lane Bridge has been damaged - I don't know how badly, or how much it will cost to repair.



There are 3 areas of subsidence (into mine shafts). The biggest is on the Richmond Avenue Grassland, which has formed a rather nice pool (where Roger Shaw's Marsh Orchid grows). The second is in the corner of Bramley Avenue Grassland, and we have deliberately allowed a bramble bed to fence off the deep hole. The third is at the bottom of the smaller Paddock (on private land) - this is unguarded and hidden amongst vegetation (I do not recommend wandering off the path!).

The flood damage from Schubert Bridge to Calcium Corner is beyond our capabilities to repair. The only solution I can think of is to allow certain areas of the Valley bottom to revert to Wetland. Calcium Corner is already going that way as the lime chippings wash out. (The Brook seems to have decided to follow its old course.) I'm also fairly certain that the area below Severnside Drive was wetland at some time in the past - judging by the number of willows and alders there.

These are just a few things for you to mull over, while you enjoy your Christmas break. If you have a flash of inspiration, please let me know – I'd be very grateful.

Have a lovely Christmas, and all the best for the New Year!

*Love and Best Wishes, Pat and Mick Howells.*

## List of Officers

Secretary: Andrew Virgin

Treasurer & Acting Chair: Pat Howells ([fos@friendsofshirtcliffe.co.uk](mailto:fos@friendsofshirtcliffe.co.uk))

## **Friends of Shirtcliffe Website and Facebook Page**

Please note: Due to family commitments, Stephanie has had to step back from looking after the Facebook Page. We would like to thank Stephanie for all her hard work.

Andrew Virgin has volunteered to take on support of the Facebook Page.

Visit and “Like” us on the Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/FriendsofShirtcliffe](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofShirtcliffe)

You can ‘spread the word’, ‘like’, ‘share’ and ‘comment’ on FOS posts and activities.

## **Fettling Smelter Wood 9<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

### *Report by Pat Howells:*

It was the hottest day of the year – being out in the sunlight was unbearable. However, it was time to fettle Smelter Wood – a comfortably shaded location!

There were 7 volunteers (Pat, Julian, Tony, Gareth, Iain, Andrew and Dave) working under the supervision of Tom Broadhead the Ranger.

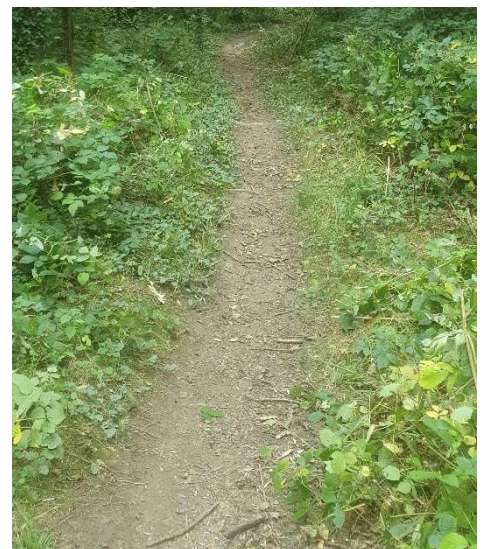
There were large blockages under both bridges. Three of the lads managed to clear the smaller one (under the Sewer Pipe Bridge). Apparently, it was quite cool in the Brook – they certainly spent a long time in the water splashing around. The larger blockage was beyond our capabilities, consisting of a large tree trunk jammed under the bridge, at the foot of the Diagonal Path. It would need special equipment to remove it.

The rest of us took our time picking up the litter along the paths. There wasn’t a lot – just 6 bags’ worth. Andrew also did a little cutting back of overhanging branches along the Sewer Pipe Path. Pat and Tom popped into the Small Glade to remove the bag of beer cans that had been left there.

Note: Dave was recovering from Covid, so he was trying to avoid close contact with the others to minimise the chance of cross-infection. He spent the time wandering the paths on his ‘lonesome’. He still managed to fill one bag all by himself.



By 2:30 PM all the work was done, including trimming the Diagonal Path. By that time, the crew was glad to stop as the heat was exhausting. Luckily, Pat had provided a packet of fruit juice each - very welcome!



*(Photographs courtesy of Andrew Virgin)*



## Flockton Park Clear-up 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023

### *Report by Pat Howells:*

It had been a while since I'd been in Flockton Park, so I thought I ought to do a walk-through prior to the work day to assess conditions. The Park can be considered as two separate areas.:

The top portion is laid out as sports fields, with nicely-mown areas of grass and good metalled paths. There is also an area of woodland round the Retford Road access point. This area of the park is kept beautifully clean by a local dog-walker who comes out every morning with a litter picker and bin bag (*she doesn't wish to be named, but she has our heartfelt thanks!*).



Following the path round into the Wetland Preserve, past the Iron Bridge access gate, conditions change. There were dumps of beer/cider cans everywhere, as well as the usual fly-tipped rubbish. It was disgusting! The bridges I could reach had blockages under them, and the water level in the Brook was high. (One of the bridges was completely flooded and inaccessible so I couldn't check it.) I was dreading the Workday!

I duly turned up on the 11<sup>th</sup>, expecting perhaps 5 people at the most. Amazingly, there were 9 volunteers and one Supervising Ranger (namely Nick Blood). One of the volunteers was Scott Ford (Community Services Officer, South-East Local Area), who had emailed me asking if he could spend an hour or so gaining hands-on experience at the event. He actually spent 3 hours working with us – a glutton for punishment!

As normal, we divided up into teams. A small group (Jamie, Nicola, and a friend) went right down to the far end, where the Brook is taken under the railway. They cleared the grille – a really horrible & dirty job. Then they wandered upstream and cleared round bridge 5. They found a large armchair in the Brook there – it was so wet and heavy they had problems carrying it!

Julian and a couple of others cleared the grille where the Brook emerges from the tunnel under Beaver Hill Road. I could hear their voices, so I wandered thinking I might take a photograph. However, it was so dark down there that all I could see were some black shapes. The only one I could identify was Julian – and that was by his hat.

I walked on with Graham. We were pulling out dumps of cider cans from the undergrowth. We filled 3 bags before we'd even reached the first bridge. (Sue had reported this bridge as being in poor condition, with broken and missing slats.) Nick, wearing his waders, turned up just as Graham and I arrived at the bridge (which was still in poor condition). He clambered down into the Brook and cleared the blockage from under the bridge. At that moment some Street Cleaners came by, and they told us that the damage to the bridge had been reported some time ago – they were surprised that it had not been repaired. They said they would report it again, and they strung red tape across to mark it as dangerous. Then they went away, taking our bags of rubbish and the junk which Nick had pulled out of the Brook.



Graham continued on to the 3<sup>rd</sup> bridge, where Sue and others were working. Between them they took out a huge load of detritus from the Brook and the surrounding area. Note: Julian had found a good sized, metal gardener's trolley dumped in the Brook. It came in very useful, needing only a slight repair. It has been carefully stowed away for future use.

I carried on to bridge 4, which was now accessible as the floodwater had gone down. There was a huge blockage just upstream. Nick came along with a crane and managed to extract all the detritus, which I carried to the road to make another pile for later removal.



Nick even managed to create a channel around the roots of a very old, gigantic, Willow growing at the edge of the bank.

Three hours of very hard work saw a lot of rubbish shifted, but another session is still needed to see it all cleared. Sue is going to see what she can arrange.

All the rubbish we had piled up was removed the next day. Thanks to Simon Griffiths and his team (South-East Area, Council Housing Service).

## **Flockton Park Clear-up: 2<sup>nd</sup> Session 12<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

*Report by Sue Smelt:*

We were back in Flockton Park today, and shifted an estimated 1.5 - 2 tonnes of stuff! There was everything; including a washing machine, lino, 2 adult bikes, a single mattress, a cone, sand pit, computer, lots of broken toys, and the usual drink cans. This list doesn't even include the fly tipping I spotted - we'll get that two weeks today!

## **Flockton Park Clear-up: 3<sup>rd</sup> Session 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

*Report by Sue Smelt:*

OK, here we are, two weeks later. Today we have collected 22 bags of assorted waste including dirty nappies, bits of old cushions and the usual littering. All this rubbish had been dumped in the bushes around the Beaver Hill Road entrance to Flockton Park.

In addition, there are around 7 tyres, a cone, a slide, lots of broken toys, helium cannisters, a car door, cannabis farm waste and the usual assortment of stuff.

This was all reported immediately on 'Fixmystreet' and left at the following what3words location - [///glow.arts.noise](#).

*Response from Mick Rooney (Councillor):*

*Hello sue another magnificent effort by all concerned. Who collects the rubbish? We did moot the idea of us naming the areas on your map as hot spots and including them in the Lac Flytipping Initiative - something Jayne or Scott would have to follow up.*



## Tidying the Bridleway 11<sup>th</sup> November 2023

*Report by Pat Howells:*

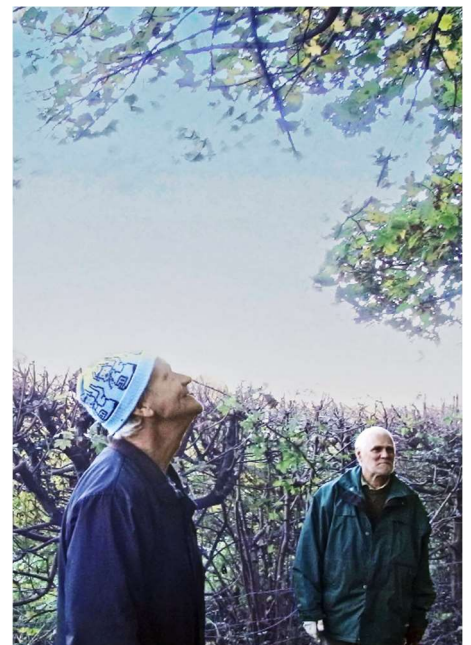
This was the last workday of the year. We took the opportunity to check the state of the Centenary Wall and to remove any trip hazards from the path.

The team was comprised of six volunteers (Gareth, Pat, Sue, Tony, Julian, and Dave) along with our doughty supervising Ranger, Nick Blood. We all grabbed secateurs & loppers and spread out along the path.



There was surprisingly little debris, despite the fact that the hedge had been flailed. It was just a matter of making sure there were no twigs sticking out at eye level. Any cut-off branches were peremptorily tossed over the Centenary Wall, where they couldn't trip or stab anyone. The only bad bit was at the top of the path at the junction with Kirk Steps. There are always a lot of brambles scrambling over the wall here. Tony and Nick whacked them back with great enthusiasm! The two combatants also cut back the bracken which is invading from the corner of the farmer's field.

Pleasingly, no stones had fallen from the wall this year – first time ever! Moreover, there were only a couple of largish branches overhanging the wall. Both of which were removed courtesy of Gareth's acrobatic skills. He was the only one agile enough to jump up and pull them down so they could be clipped off.



There was very little litter – 3 beer cans, 2 plastic bottles, and a woven plastic bag. I shoved them into a bin bag and popped them into the recycling bin at home.

It was a lovely, relatively easy session – just right for a bright afternoon in autumn. Such a pleasure after some of the recent work days!



## Ranger Day 13<sup>th</sup> December 2023

*Report by Susan Smelt:*

On Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> December, David M (on his birthday too!), David H, Andrew and me met with Nick to do a clean-up at the bottom of New Cross Walk - by the entrances to the woodland at the western end of Severnside Drive. Thankfully, the rain held off until we had finished.



Simon's team had made a flying visit the day before and made a start, promising to return on 13<sup>th</sup> to collect the remaining haul. (Simon Griffiths is the SCC Estate Team Leader for our area.)

It was a disgrace, as usual, with signs that most of what is being dumped there is undoubtedly from the houses on the estate.

David H started to tackle the upper end, retrieving broken drawers and discarded toys amongst a load of other rammel.

David M was heavily into furniture removals - having sniffed out broken and burnt-out furniture items complete with coiled springs, which had been taken much further into the woods.



Nick, armed with saws and other effective implements, disappeared into the lower end of the undergrowth chopping and cutting as he went. He found what was obviously a former entrance into the woods. This had become choked up with brambles, bushes and lots of spikey stuff - which ensured this was not straight forward. Andrew joined him, and to our annoyance we found that for every bag we removed there were further bags concealed (ditto Flockton Park!). At any rate, we did our very best to tidy things up. Although it looked better in the end, there remains some deep-seated rubbish to collect but it's hard to get at. Many of the plastic bags have already started to deteriorate, which ensures the task is twice as difficult.

We managed 9 large bags, 2 single mattresses, broken furniture, a pallet, 4 footballs, broken toys, and the usual items.



This has already become a routine spot for our attention - so as Susie says 'we will be back' ☹️.

Thankfully, Simon was as good as his word, and everything had been collected by the end of the afternoon.

## Schedule of Events 2024

### Ranger-supervised Workdays

The week before each workday, FoS Officers undertake a Risk Assessment walk. If you spot any problems in the meantime, please let one of the committee members know.

<u>FoS Workdays</u> All on Saturdays, 1pm to 3pm Leader: Pat Howells	<u>S13 – Keep it Clean Workdays</u> All on Wednesdays 10am to Noon Leader: Susan Smelt
January 13 <sup>th</sup> Fettle Smelter Wood	February 21 <sup>st</sup>
March 9 <sup>th</sup> Vicar Lane Scrapedown	April 17 <sup>th</sup>
May 11 <sup>th</sup> Clearing Small Glade	June 12 <sup>th</sup>
July 13 <sup>th</sup> Clear Valley Bottom Path	August 14 <sup>th</sup>
September 14 <sup>th</sup> Clearing Calcium Corner	October 9 <sup>th</sup>
November 9 <sup>th</sup> Tidy Bridleway	December 11 <sup>th</sup>

### Sue's Litter Team work days: all on Wednesdays.

Sue takes regular walks around the district, checking for fly-tipping hotspots and general littering. Depending on what she finds, and after discussion with the S13 Group, a plan of action is agreed. Sue then organises the necessary tasks with her team, as well as making sure that equipment is provided. She also arranges for the collected rubbish to be taken away as soon as possible.

### Other Events:

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January, Roadhogs Winter Run (arranged by Tony Weightman). Start time 11:00am, meeting point yet to be arranged.

Please check the Handsworth Roadhogs website for the latest information.

*June 2024 (yet to be arranged) Preparation for Handsworth Hobble, and the Handsworth Hobble itself*

*Autumn - a time of mellow fruitfulness.*

*!! If only !!*

**MERRY CHRISTMAS**